

Nut Pickin'

The cooler autumn air brings with it a change in leaf color accompanied by nuts maturing and dropping to the ground. Most nuts are sweet, high in protein, and can be used as a substitute for meat in the diet. They are also rich in unsaturated fats that give them a high caloric value but no cholesterol.

True nuts are characterized by a single seed, a hard shell, and a protective husk that can take different shapes. Common nuts in the eastern U.S. include hazelnuts, beechnuts, walnuts, hickory, and chestnuts. Hazelnuts have a leafy outer husk while chestnuts have needle-sharp spines surrounding the shell. Acorns have a cap and a beechnut has a triangular husk with weak spines. The outer husk of a black walnut looks like a smooth, green ball whereas the hickory nut is ribbed. The ribs split open when the hickory nut matures to release the shell. Walnuts drop to the ground with the outer husk intact.



Black Walnuts (*Juglans nigra*)

Nuts have been referred to as “brain food” due to their serotonin content. According to Jim Duke, the black walnut, which looks like a brain, is the best source of serotonin. This is befitting of the “Doctrine of Signatures” which is based on “like cures like” and that the shape or color of a plant indicates its use. In this case, the brain-shaped nut is the best source of brain food.

Black walnuts are found in the eastern half of the United States except for the northern border. They are large trees with compound leaves consisting of 7-19 toothed leaflets that turn yellow in autumn. The fruit is a thick-shelled nut with ridges enclosed in a green husk that does not split open at maturity.

Walnuts begin dropping to the ground in mid-September and should be gathered soon after falling. If they remain on the ground for more than a few days, they become infested with maggots and turn black. The green outer hull can be tintured and used to treat parasites and ringworm.

Removing the husk without getting stained can be tricky. Wearing gloves is a must unless you don't mind sporting around hands stained yellow-brown for several weeks. This stain can be used as a dye or to stain wood.

The easiest way to remove the husks is to place the walnuts in the driveway and run over them in your car. Break away the hulls and rinse the nuts in a bucket of water, removing any that float. Spread in a single layer on mats to dry. Once dry, they can be stored in a cool, dry place until needed.

The shells of black walnuts are thick and hard with deep ridges. The best way to remove the nutmeat is with a hammer or a hard rock and a concrete block. Position the walnut on its side and give it a good firm whack. You may have to practice a bit to develop the right technique for removing the nutmeat in large pieces.

A pound of walnuts will yield about a cup of shelled nutmeats. Place the nutmeats in a food chopper or blender for use in cookies or cakes. Due to their high caloric value and the strong flavor, they should be used in small quantities.

References

USDA Forest Service. Retrieved from <https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/ethnobotany/food/nuts.shtml>.



Nut-Berry Oatmeal Cookies

1/2 cup butter	1 cup flour
1 cup organic cane sugar	2 cups rolled oats
1 tsp vanilla	1/4 cup chopped walnuts
2 eggs	1/2 cup wild blueberries

- Cream together butter and cane sugar until fluffy. Stir in vanilla and add eggs, beating after adding.
- Add flour, stir in oats, nuts, and blueberries.
- Drop by teaspoonfuls on greased baking sheet and bake at 350 for 10-15 minutes.